

Pathways

The magazine for the people of the Diocese of Oxford | Autumn 2019 | **FREE**

Nurturing every child

in our schools and churches



PLUS: Set up a school chaplaincy | A welcoming church? | Loneliness



Hello

As *Pathways* went to press millions of people young and old were demanding urgent action to tackle global heating. A few days earlier we heard once again concerns about the effects of social media on our collective wellbeing.

The climate crisis and the impact of new technologies are the defining issues of our age. Social media only began to creep into classrooms as recently as 2004. It's hard to predict where technology will be in another 15 years, but we do know that by 2035 our climate could be past the point of no return.

There are signs of hope. The Climate Strikes are the outworking of a worldwide, youth-led movement that began last year with a solitary protest by Swedish teenager Greta Thunberg. A few months ago, 42 countries adopted human-centred Principles on Artificial Intelligence. Closer to home our guide to making social media kinder has been widely shared, and, as part of our vision of a more Christ-like Church, parishes are signing up for free church energy audits.

There is much further to go. Children and young people are on the frontlines as never before. Our churches have a great responsibility and opportunity to support them. This edition of *Pathways* looks at some of the ways you can do just that.

From advice on setting up a school chaplaincy, to considering how welcoming (or not) our church buildings are, I hope that this magazine will prompt every reader to ask, 'how can my church reach further out to children and young people?'

Not every new initiative will need funding to get going, but some will. Did you know that parishes, benefices and deaneries can now bid for grants from our new development fund to support local Christ-like Church projects? You'll find details about the fund on the website.

Finally, please remember our leaders and politicians in your prayers as they continue to wrestle with the challenges and opportunity costs of Brexit. Join me in praying daily for wise decisions and good government; for care for the poor and for the earth; for fresh political vision and the return of kindness to our politics.



Bishop Steven

Pictured: Bishop Steven is interviewed among the crowds attending a mass lobby of parliament for the climate. Visit blogs.oxford.anglican.org to find out more.



What is Gniyllub?

Where can you find a concept as amazing as Gniyllub combined with DIY Olympics, water volleyball and a host of other fun shenanigans and malarkey? Yellow Braces is our annual youth camp for 11-18-year-olds from across the Diocese. Check out *Pathways Live* for a report from this year's event and find out how to join in next year.



Prince Harry visit

A local christian charity received a visit from Prince Harry recently. The Duke visited Innovista's Thrive teams which provide mentoring for disadvantaged young people around Oxford. Devon, 20, who attended the Young Leaders' training programme says: "I've learned and grown so much and I feel like I've got a contribution to make... Now I want to do that for someone else."



For longer versions of these stories and more news and interesting features visit oxford.anglican.org/pathways



Waddesdon School



Good mental health

Good mental health is a shared responsibility at Waddesdon CofE Secondary School and intrinsic to their Christian values. Working to reduce the stigma that often surrounds mental health, PSHE classes prepare young people for the outside world. Peer mentors and sports-based programmes support student wellbeing and resilience.

Liz Hudson



Serving to build community

There's a primary school in Thatcham which is 'walking the walk' in its partnership with the local church. The church gets involved in all aspects of school life and has been changing the lives of families. There's even a low-cost gift shop so children can get a surprise for a parent or carer. "It's about the way we interact, not what the interactions are" says the head teacher.

stories,
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 days-live

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We hope you enjoy reading *Pathways*. Email or write and let us know what you think. Contributor enquiries are welcome.

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Follow us on Twitter and Facebook for local news and prayers.

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Children's everyday faith

"I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children..." Luke 10:21

A walk with a toddler, if you are prepared to let them meander as they wish, can be the adventure of a lifetime. It's about the journey, not the destination.

My daughter once stopped and stared at snails 'sleeping' in the holes of a wall. I'd never imagined how many snails could live there. The ability to look and notice where and how God is present is one of the most important tools we need for a lifelong journey of faith.

Likewise, if we are working with children in church, it's worth considering whether we are using a deadline and destination model to teach them about faith. It's easy to see the destination and the deadline as the point at which they will stop attending church, and so feel we must fill

them up with as much Bible knowledge as possible first.

We desperately hope that this knowledge will magically transform into a living faith that will 'bring them back to church'. That model is too broken to fix. Faith is a life-long journey. How can we find ways to journey together with children and young people in their spiritual life and faith?

We must be guided by them even as we guide them. This is all about spiritual practices that allow us to slow down, notice God and God's activity in us, those around us, and the world at large. Our challenge is to rediscover the value of journeying together. Here are four ideas to get you started.



Go Slow

The most brilliant thing about walking with toddlers is that they make you go slow. Their legs are little. They meander here and there and back again with no concern or worry about 'going the wrong way'. Our culture is frenetic, but to nurture faith and spirituality we must slow down.

Fall over

Falling over, getting up and sometimes being carried are parts of the journey. As toddlers bound around, fall over and bounce back up they sometimes need a hand over a big obstacle. Just like the rest of us. We all need to be open to a literal and metaphorical hand on our spiritual journeys.

Go deeper

"...as we are all born with an inherent creativity, I believe that all human beings enter the world as spiritual creatures..." says Dave Csinos, author and researcher into children's spirituality. He argues we are educating children out of spirituality. To go deeper with this concept visit **davecsinos.com**

Connect better

Many churches have a heart to better connect with children and young people but aren't sure how. Our Youth and Child Friendly Awards help churches take a fresh look at the welcome and community they are offering, while challenging them on what may need to be changed, tweaked, or added.

bit.ly/friendlyawards

*Everyday faith is about living a fuller life in God from Sunday to Saturday. Find out more at **oxford.anglican.org/pathways/everyday-faith***

Words: Yvonne Morris



***"I see God as a source
of strength rather than
resenting him."***



Tim Ford

Tim Ford, 24, prays regularly and refuses to let cerebral palsy, a condition that means he is non-verbal and a permanent wheelchair user, stop him living a rich life.

Born in Papua New Guinea, where his mum and dad worked, Tim's family moved back to the UK when he was 18 months old. Growing up in Stokenchurch, Tim knew God saved his life when he was born. He asked Jesus into his life aged four, with the help of his eight-year-old brother.

Tim was baptised by full immersion and later confirmed in St Peter and St Paul's, Stokenchurch. "I was keen to get confirmed as I felt God was calling me to help in the Church of England and this was the next step," says Tim, who lives partly with his mum Heather and stepdad John, and partly in a residential facility in Colchester.

Faith helped sustain Tim and his family, especially when his dad died in 2005. The family were able to process their loss and grief together, in the year before Tim moved from a mainstream primary to a specialist boarding school. "Help from the chaplain at the school encouraged me in my faith as a teenager, and God brought him to me at one of the hardest times when I was depressed because of the bad treatment I got from someone," says Tim.

In his mid-teens, Tim had a picture of a basket full of bread and felt God wanted him to 'feed the world'. He responded later by starting an email Thought for the Day. For two years Tim wrote for a church magazine and he regularly preaches in Colchester. He plans to do a preaching course, is about to get his own blog and is doing Christian Studies and counselling courses.

Heather says that Tim has always had a pastoral heart and invites ministers of all denominations home to hear their stories and encourage them.

"I want to help the church to learn more about what God is saying to us through studies about the mind and the value of talking about our problems," says Tim, speaking through a computer, linked to the headrest on his wheelchair.

Tim supports the hospitals in Oxford using his insights as a service user. Six years ago, major surgery meant spending a week in intensive care. There he had a glimpse of heaven and once again felt that God has a purpose for his life.


Tim's hobbies include cooking with the help of carers, reading adventure novels, shopping, collecting teddy bears and making greetings cards. So what is the key to Tim's strong faith in the face of his disabilities?

"I see God as a source of strength, rather than resenting him. Looking beyond today is important. Being in a wheelchair means I am dependant on other people, but it means my life is enriched because I get to meet all of these different people," he says. ¶

Words and photo: Jo Duckles



We featured Revd Katie Tupling, Diocesan Disability Advisor, in the last issue. Listen to her in conversation with Bishop Steven: oxford.anglican.org/katie-tupling



“Our beautiful church buildings remind us that God is to be encountered in places, as he seeks to enrich and deepen our lives through the saving work of Jesus Christ.”

How to welcome

There are many reasons why people visit churches. History and heritage may be a factor. We can't assume anything about people's reasons for visiting, but we can give them a space in which they can take time away from the demands of the world, gain a new perspective on their lives, and encounter our faith and God.

In Genesis, Jacob declares, "Surely the Lord is in this place... this is none other than the house of God, and the gate of heaven". In a busy and distracted world our churches have great potential to be places for quiet and reflection, stillness and prayer. Places where glimpses of the divine can be experienced.

But what is the experience of a visitor when they first set foot in your church? Ask someone who is not a regular worshipper to give their honest impressions of the building and its setting. Starting in the grounds and ending at the altar, these are some of the things to think about together.

Your churchyard

Is the seating in good shape and in such a position to enjoy the peacefulness of the churchyard and invite contemplation? Is the notice board smart and up to date with useful and interesting information?

The porch

As you walk through the porch, is there a bombardment of rotas, insurance certificates and churchyard regulations? While these are important, don't let them take pride of place over welcoming words inviting visitors to share God's presence within.

The entrance

Think about the atmosphere on entering your church (be sure to use all of your senses). What could be improved to enhance the ambience and so strengthen our response to God's presence?

Is there a welcome leaflet, a guide to experiencing God, in the entrance? This could include something for children to do. Clive Fewins' book *Be A Church Detective: A Young Person's Guide to Old Churches* has some creative and helpful ideas.

Open for prayer?

Prayer stations, prayer trees, and votive stands are popular with visitors. Are these available in your church and easy to access? Some sentences on what prayer is can be a useful aid. Could you offer some simple prayer cards for people to take away with them?

Inside your church

Is there information about the font, pulpit and altar on display? Could you create a reflective guide for visitors as they walk around your church? Here's one suggestion:

*Listen carefully. What can you hear?
Do you hear footsteps, voices, traffic, music,
the cooing of pigeons? These ancient stones
have soaked up the prayers and music and
everyday sounds from ordinary people for hundreds
of years; they have witnessed sombre tragedies
and great joys. Be glad to be part of an ancient
tradition of faith which reaches back through time,
and forwards into the future...*



Download *Experiencing God's presence in your church building* to assess your church inside and out and create a visitor guide
oxford.anglican.org/encounterfaith

Confirmation

Confirmation, whether you are aged eight or 80, is a transitional moment for many people when they publicly declare they are a follower of Jesus and will endeavour to live as one of his disciples.

One of the things I most enjoy as a bishop is taking confirmation services. Over the past 19 years I have led hundreds. Each is different because the people coming to be confirmed are different. Whether they are eight or 80 they see confirmation – a service where they can confirm the vows made by them or for them at baptism – as a significant point in their faith journey. It is a way they can say publicly they are a follower of Jesus Christ; they believe in God; and they want to live in ways that reflect his values through the life the Holy Spirit brings.

The experiences that bring people to confirmation vary. For some, though for increasingly few, it is seen as the right thing to do. For others it is much more a rite of passage as a person marks the transition from childhood to becoming an adult member of the church. For adults it is often linked to an awakening, or a reawakening, of faith or, and I have heard this so many times, it comes from a feeling of incompleteness. They missed being confirmed when they were younger, and they want to catch up.


Connected to that is the phrase I sometimes hear – ‘You know, Bishop, I was confirmed when I was too young.’ When I ask what they mean they usually say that they did not have the emotional, theological or intellectual ability to

realise the implications of the promises they were making. At that point what I want to say – and sometimes do – is that it’s not unusual for us to make promises where we do not fully understand what we are promising to do but we make them to the best of our ability and understanding. An eight-year-old’s faith will be different from that of an adult, but both are valid. Equally, there are a few people I have confirmed with very limited speech or any articulated understanding of the faith. Their families and friends knew full well that confirmation mattered greatly to them. Taking those was a huge privilege.

When I meet people, who feel that they were too young when they were confirmed – or if they felt that they lacked understanding, I encourage them to think about renewing their vows. This can easily be done in the context of a confirmation service and is very meaningful.

Confessing Christ as our Lord is something that matters at each stage of our lives and confirmation is a key way in which we can do this. If you have not been confirmed can I encourage you to have a word with your vicar about it and see how things develop from there. ¶

*Words: The Rt Revd Colin Fletcher, the Bishop of Dorchester.
Photo: Jo Duckles*



“Then Peter and John laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.”

Acts 8:17



The Church of England website has useful information about confirmation and what to expect. Visit bit.ly/confirmationfaqs

Meat eating



Katherine Phillips is a librarian who lives in West Oxford.

There are as many reasons for eschewing meat and dairy as there are human beings. Most non-meat eaters I have met fall into one of two broad categories; those who describe themselves as vegan and those who eat a wholefoods plant-based diet.

Vegans makes lifestyle decisions as well as food choices to avoid cruelty to sentient life. They would avoid leather clothing and buy cleaning products and make-up involving less cruelty. The motivation for a plant-based diet is often a serious health scare so this group will avoid the high fat fake meat, cheese and mayonnaise which some vegans see as handy substitutes, and prefer minimal processing of food and cook without fat or oil. Both groups share desperate concerns about climate, sustainability and the urgent need to develop equitable delivery of food and other global resources.

"... what people believe is of secondary importance to what they do."

I mostly follow a wholefoods plant-based diet though saying I am vegan can be a handy verbal shorthand. I sometimes eat off plan, usually in situations where to ask for something different or reject hospitality could be construed as

rude, occasionally just due to my own bad planning. Sometimes it's appropriate to explain my views, sometimes it's not.

I have been trying to follow the McDougall Programme (John McDougall is an American plant-

based doctor) for nine years but still struggle with chocolate. For some, cheese or bacon are Achilles' heels. I wonder whether vegans deal with the cravings a bit better than those who are plant based simply because if you are doing it for the animals, then you will always love the animals. We don't always care for ourselves quite as much as we should.

Katherine's article continues overleaf

In each edition of *Pathways*, we ask two Christians with different perspectives to explore a topical issue. The health and ecological benefits of veganism versus a carnivorous diet are being widely debated as the rain forests burn and global warming threatens our future. So, should we stop eating animals and embrace plant-based diets?

The Garden of Self-Righteousness has never needed the manure of social media when it comes to the emotive subject of food: it's always produced a bumper crop of finger-pointing. On both sides.

Sides? Absolutes? Sliding scale? Is sneaking the odd Big Mac 'equal' to a guy on television struggling his way through half a cow as some sort of macho challenge? Of course it's not. Those displays of excess revolt me and I eat meat. I understand the arguments for veganism. But I

don't feel eating meat has made me Satan's favourite redneck.

We have the luxury - and responsibility - of choice. I can't, however, imagine anyone is busting to tell an Inuit who eats seal that they are wrong. There's a whole load of other sensibilities that come into play. Does that mean they get a patronising, ethical sick note? It's

not the consumption of meat that's questionable but our approach sometimes and we'd do well to emulate the respect some other cultures give to animals, both alive and dying.

"... we'd do well to emulate the respect some other cultures give to animals."

So we look to the Bible for guidance. (Call me a coward but I'm giving Leviticus a miss.) In Exodus, we are told how to cook meat (barbecue okay, boiling not). And should Peter really resist a voice from heaven telling him to kill and eat (Acts 10)? In fact, there's a whole maze of cloven hooves, etc. to negotiate, so

I'm chickening (yes, you can eat those) out.

Then there's the whole fish scenario, for example Jesus telling the disciples to cast their net on the other side, the Feeding of the Five Thousand, et al. The very fact Jesus' disciples were fishermen should give us some indication of his views on eating fish.



Tom Bower is the Assistant Education Officer at Oxford's Christ Church Cathedral and internationally published children's author and illustrator.

Tom's article continues overleaf

[Katherine...]

How to connect this choice to my faith? The word faith makes me panic in the way Radio 4's 'Money Box' does when the topic under discussion is crucial. What people believe is of secondary importance to what they do and I'm aware that forms of human expression such as the arts and languages give me a sense of something outside my solitary experiences, as do the times when I feel connected to nature. Attacks on nature and cruelty to sentient life feel very personal and highlight the importance of small steps to nurture rather than despoil our planet.

For me the 'Canticle of the Creatures' by St Francis of Assisi beautifully sums up the importance of the relationship between us and the world in which we live:

"Praised be You my Lord with all Your creatures, especially Sir Brother Sun, Who is the day through whom You give us light. And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendour ... Praised be You my Lord through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, producing varied fruits with coloured flowers and herbs."

We have a duty to try to care for our Mother Earth. Future generations following where we have passed should not suffer as a result of our selfish choices.

[Tom...]

Although that wasn't in the North Sea and was long before there was any danger of our cod supplies running out.

Sure, fish in some people's eyes are not in the same category as a cute little lamb, but is 'cuteness' part of the problem here?

Are we perhaps letting Disneyfication of the farmyard influence us? Take the 'ugly' blobfish: if it was fluffy and played Chopsticks on YouTube, raising money for its conservation wouldn't be such a struggle.

Regarding animal sacrifice in the temple (surely related), it was what people did and Jesus never speaks against it, so we assume he was okay about it. He, however, offered himself instead as a sacrifice for all, for good: this has superseded any idea of 'sacrificial' customs on our part.

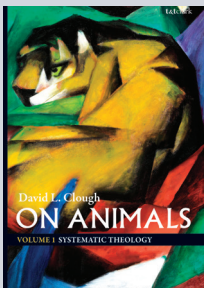
I know other omnivores who, like myself, love vegan food. It's a matter of balance. The same goes for discussing it. When food (or any other cause) becomes a cudgel to smack others with, it's maybe time to log off Twitter and go for a walk... perhaps in the countryside past those fields of nice cows and sheep...

Further reading

defaultveg.com/ encourages institutions to offer plant-based meals by default whenever they serve food. Diners can choose to add meat, encouraging everyone to make healthier, environmentally friendly choices. Its founder is David Clough, author of *On Animals* a two-volume engagement with Christianity in

relation to animal welfare.

Two-part BBC World Service *The Food Chain* documentary gives the cases for and against eating meat. Listen here: bbc.co.uk/programmes/p02dk0tl and here: bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p02f31f2



"Clough's work in *On Animals* is progressive and explorative ... a new benchmark for the field."

Matthew Barton,
University of Leeds,
Theological Book Review



"From conscience to cholesterol..."

These programmes explore how meat-eating fits, or doesn't fit, into a healthy, ethical life.

Serving every school

Young people are growing up searching for identity and meaning and purpose. The Church is in a fantastic position to help.

The re-imagining of our ministry with children and young people is one of seven areas of focus as we seek to become a more Christ-like Church. How can we meet their need for sanctuary and safe spaces, for contemplation and purpose, for acceptance and identity?

There are reports of 'an epidemic of anxiety' for young people. Did you know that one in ten children aged 5-16 suffer from a diagnosable mental health disorder? One in four girls aged 14 self-harm in some way. For boys the symptoms are often different, but the inner turmoil is the same.

"Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs."

The Diocese of Oxford works with 15,000 children and young people every week in our churches and we share in the education of 60,000 children at 282 church schools, and many more through 18 multi-academy trusts and independent schools. No other group of people in the Thames Valley is in a better position to help.

Serving every school in our community

Each of us has something to contribute. The inside cover of this magazine includes the story of a church and school partnership in Thatcham. Could this happen in your town or village? And there's an urgent call for school governors and trustees on the back cover. Might that be you?

We want to build stronger links with every school, led by teams from local churches and supported by our Diocesan Chaplaincy Adviser. You don't need to be ordained to lead a schools chaplaincy initiative. Turn the page for 10 ways to build a closer relationship with your local school.



Last year, the Loneliness Experiment, a nationwide survey conducted by the BBC and the Wellcome Collection, found that 16-24 year olds experience loneliness more often and more intensely than any other age group.

Being a teenager has never been the easiest stage of life; the physical, psychological, emotional, sociological and spiritual shifts that take place as young people emerge from childhood into adult life are always significant. Today's children and young people are connected through their phones but disconnected from the relationships they need. Two initiatives now underway in the Diocese provide much needed support.

Local support for secondary schools

Our secondary schools welcome and need the support we have to offer. In Bracknell, local churches are working in partnership with schools to provide mentoring support, prayer spaces, a Christian Union and, eventually, pastoral care for pupils and staff. The deanery is now seeking grants to support a full-time chaplain who will serve some of the primary and secondary schools in the area.

Contemplative toolkit

A new approach, currently at early pilot stage with four primary schools in the Diocese, draws on ancient contemplative practices in a way that is inclusive of every pupil.

Using the contemplative toolkit, staff and children learn to apply a cycle of stilling, noticing, dwelling, mending and blessing to their day to day lives. As the toolkit is developed, we hope that local churches will be able to go into schools to teach and model this approach for young people.

Could God be calling your church to working more closely with local schools? Our new Parish Planning Tool contains everything you need to navigate God's call for your church. It's suitable for use by every parish/benefice in the Diocese of Oxford, whatever your local context.

Not every new initiative needs funding to get going, but what if your plans for working with local schools do? Parishes, benefices and deaneries can also bid for grants from a new development fund to support local Christ-like Church projects. ¶



To find out more about the tools and funds that could assist you to better support local schools, visit oxford.anglican.org/commonvision

Photo: Shutterstock



7

Build a team. A fully paid chaplain's post is unlikely to emerge quickly so who else could support the chaplaincy work?

Set up a school chaplaincy

Schools are under increasing pressure. With funding cuts and increasing mental health issues for children and young people, chaplaincies provide much-needed support for staff and pupils alike.

1

Meet with parish and school leaders. What are the links and relationships that already exist?

2

Find out who in the parish, other churches or the school can offer time, money, or energy (or all three).

3

Put schools on the agenda at PCC, deanery synod and chapter meetings. Try this: bit.ly/PCC-guide

4

Form a working party of those who will make an effective, easily mobilised and dynamic group for carrying the vision forward.

5

Ask the school: "How can we best serve you?" We tell ourselves that schools are not interested in Christian values. It's not true.

6

Think about who in your community might make a good chaplain. This may be a Licensed Lay Minister, youth worker or a retired teacher.

8

Create a realistic job description for a chaplain or chaplaincy leader. Contact the Diocesan Chaplaincy Adviser for help if you need it.

9

Train the chaplain. Ensure continuing training is in place for keeping up to date the skills necessary for a successful chaplaincy.

10

Commission the chaplain. Your chaplain should be commissioned in a service or assembly that involves the school and local churches.

Loneliness

'A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling. God sets the lonely in families, he leads out the prisoners with singing...' Psalm 68:5-6

Loneliness is the trigger emotion letting us know we need to seek out company. It's as natural as a rumbling tummy that tells us it's time to eat. But scratching that itch isn't as simple as having a bite to eat.

Left untended, loneliness can be more damaging than obesity, but shame and stigma surround this condition, even though it affects us all at some point in our lives. A fear of appearing 'uncool' might stop younger people seeking help. For older people, isolation and simply not knowing where to go for company might be a factor. But there are ways to cure the increasing spiral of desolation caused by loneliness.

In Oxford, the Archway Foundation works with people of all ages affected by loneliness. A Social Space and Social Hub give participants, called 'friends', the chance to meet and enjoy interactive activities like board games.

"There seems to be a continuum of young people finding themselves isolated and lonely. For some it is circumstances changing - location, jobs and relationships. For most of the friends we support, social interactions and friendships may always have been difficult," says Lynne Wigginton, Young Adults Service Co-ordinator at Archway.

Archway's many projects include Wednesday Welcome, based in an Oxford church, where tea and cake are served. Like the social hub and social space, there are volunteers and friends, and it can be difficult to tell who is who.

Director Sheila Furlong says: "There's fluidity. Some people who come as friends become

volunteers and some volunteers become friends as circumstances in their life change. There are times when any of us feel wounded and broken. We learn from each other and belong together."

Archway's model for helping people find that vital connection is one that could easily be replicated in churches for people of all ages. In fact, community and fellowship with other human beings is surely what church is about. Whether it's a youth group or a group specifically for older people, any regular event is helping people build friendships that are vital to feeling happy and satisfied.

St Mary and St Nicholas in Littlemore shines hope into a community blighted by poverty by inviting people in for free breakfasts, coffee mornings and other events. The Curate, Revd Hannah Cartwright, says: "I went into some local flats and could sense the depression that comes over you. I have met people who are often trapped inside their own space. A couple of mornings a week we give people an excuse to get out of their house."

St Mary and St Nicholas is one of hundreds of churches across our Diocese providing this sort of simple but vital service. Could your church, or your community, do something similar? ¶

*Words and photo: Jo Duckles
Bible translation: New International Version (NIV)*



Loneliness: Accident or Injustice? looks at the work being done to combat loneliness in ordinary and extraordinary ways. Read it online at oxford.anglican.org/responding-to-loneliness

Seven things you can do

We all feel lonely from time to time but loneliness, living alone and poor social connections can be as bad for your health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day.

Anti-bullying charity Ditch the Label has 7 tips for remembering that you're not alone. Find out more at ditchthelabel.org

1. Social media isn't real
2. Remember your worth
3. Start something you enjoy
4. Compliment yourself
5. Don't settle for bad friends
6. Tell someone you miss them
7. Embrace 'me' time.



Our new Dwelling in the Word passage is Acts 20.17-38. It is one of the key passages in Acts as Paul roots his ministry in the call to be like Christ and gives to the whole church timeless principles for Christian mission.

¹⁷ From Miletus he sent a message to Ephesus, asking the elders of the church to meet him.

¹⁸ When they came to him, he said to them:

'You yourselves know how I lived among you the entire time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, ¹⁹ serving the Lord with all humility and with tears, enduring the trials that came to me through the plots of the Jews. ²⁰ I did not shrink from doing anything helpful, proclaiming the message to you and teaching you publicly and from house to house, ²¹ as I testified to both Jews and Greeks about repentance towards God and faith towards our Lord Jesus. ²² And now, as a captive to the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, ²³ except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and persecutions are waiting for me. ²⁴ But I do not count my life of any value to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the good news of God's grace.

²⁵ 'And now I know that none of you, among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom, will ever see my face again. ²⁶ Therefore I declare to you this day that I am not responsible for the blood of any of you, ²⁷ for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God. ²⁸ Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son. ²⁹ I know that after I have gone, savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. ³⁰ Some even from your own group will come distorting the truth in order to entice the disciples to follow them. ³¹ Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to warn everyone with tears. ³² And now I commend you to God and to the message of his grace, a message that is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all who are sanctified. ³³ I coveted no one's silver or gold or clothing. ³⁴ You know for yourselves that I worked with my own hands to support myself and my companions. ³⁵ In all this I have given you an example that by such work we must support the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, for he himself said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

³⁶ When he had finished speaking, he knelt down with them all and prayed. ³⁷ There was much weeping among them all; they embraced Paul and kissed him, ³⁸ grieving especially because of what he had said, that they would not see him again. Then they brought him to the ship.

These verses are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible

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Dwell in the Word with children

Children are providing their own unique insights into scripture as they Dwell in the Word at the St Mark and All Saints Benefice in Reading. **The Revd Jo Williams**, describes how.

"Peace is the most important thing, you have to say that first," was the response of children as one five-year-old led us in wondering about how we could tell people about the kingdom. The children had just heard the Luke 10 vs 1-12 passage for the first time. We talked about who we might tell, and what we might say. The children continued talking about the importance of peace: "Yes, that way they will know you are a friend... we say peace to everyone when we (high five/fist bump) after the story." The children realised it was the same peace that Jesus gave us all.

As well as our formal process of Dwelling at the start of every church meeting, our youngsters engage with the passage in our monthly children's service.

We read straight from the NIV Bible, occasionally simplifying a more complex word or phrase for clarity and using visual prompts in the style of a Godly Play story.

To help children and adults speak about what they were noticing we use wondering questions, "I wonder what you liked best?", "I wonder what you particularly noticed in the story today?", and sometimes, "I wonder what part of the story is about you?"

We found this helped even the two and three-year-olds to participate.

Dwelling is helping our whole church to engage with scripture in a new way. Bible passages

are not just stories to be taught but texts to be reflected on. It helps us learn to be attentive to each other and to God.

This reminds me that just nine verses on from the passage we have been studying Jesus says: "You have hidden these things from the wise and learned and revealed them to little children".

We look forward to sharing their insights on the new passage this year! (see opposite page)

Tips for Dwelling with children under 10.

- Choose your translation carefully - if necessary, simplify any complex words or phrases. (Issue one of *Pathways* used the *International Children's Bible* for the Dwelling in the Word passage.)
- Use pictures or symbols to help children follow the passage - even preverbal children can indicate what they notice in a visual story.
- Allow the text to speak for itself - try not to interpret.
- Use open-ended questions to get people talking about what they notice.
- Repeat back what you hear people saying. 🗣️



See *Pathways* online for more on Dwelling in the Word: [oxford.anglican.org/how-to](https://www.oxford.anglican.org/how-to)

God of nurturing love,

Yourself both child and parent, playful and wise,
Reawaken in us youthful energy, life and possibility,
Draw us to notice with a child's eye "Heaven in a
wild flower",

Astound us into wonder at the beauty, tenderness and
frailty of your creation,
And kindle in us a child's simple trust in you.

We pray for all who, with and in our schools, share your
call to nurture.

We pray for all our young people who are growing up
carrying possibility and uncertainty,
security and vulnerability,
faith and questions;

May they find a parent's embrace, a teacher's
encouragement and a sibling's play in you.

Inspire each of us in our joint act of parenting your
children and our own,

Remembering that when we welcome a child
we also welcome Jesus himself,
our Lord, our friend and our brother.

In his name we pray
Amen

Empathising with people of all generations is important and enriching. See pages six and seven for guidance on nurturing children's spirituality and why a walk with a toddler is a lesson for us all. 🙏

*Prayer by Charlie Kerr
Photo: Shutterstock*



GodVenture produce amazing resources that help children and their families to encounter God. To find out more, visit godventure.co.uk

A lady in a dark dress told me...

My earliest memory of being in a church was when I was about four years old. I attended a summer vacation Bible School in a church basement in the USA.

I remember an older woman in a dark dress, and she was leading us in singing the song: Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so. Little ones to him belong, they are weak...

"Stop... Stop. Children... Let's not sing it 'THEY are weak'. Let's sing it 'WE are weak'," she said. So, we all sang, 'Little ones to him belong, we are weak, but he is strong.'

I can remember thinking: 'That lady thinks she's a little child that belongs to Jesus and I am the little one that belongs to Jesus too!'

I believe that was the day I first realised that Jesus called me to be his child. An old lady, whose name I don't know, loved Jesus and told a little four-year-old girl about the one who loves her most.

Through my teen years and into my early twenties I wandered. I played around with drugs and eastern mysticism, Bahai, and other religions, thinking there surely must be many ways to God... but the Singer and his song kept calling me back.

Finally, one night, I prayed: "God, I really want to know who the true God is. If Jesus is really the only way, if he died on the cross for my sins, then yes, I surrender. Forgive me my sins. I want to be your child. But I need to know, so please show me what your truth is. I will give you two weeks. I will go to one of your churches and read your Bible for two weeks, but by then I need to know this is real and not just a mind game like so many others that I have looked into. Amen"

Looking back, that wasn't a very respectful prayer, but God is gracious and he met that wandering soul right where she was.

It didn't take two weeks to realise that Jesus was real and loved me. In a matter of a couple of days, as I read the Gospel of John and prayed, I knew I belonged to Jesus. I knew my sins were forgiven! I knew I had peace with God. I knew I was that little child that Jesus loves.

"Yes, Jesus loves me, the Bible tells me so." ¶

As told to Pathways by Anita Saunders. Along with her husband and a fabulous team, Anita runs the JOY place - a monthly church service for adults with learning disabilities and their friends and families: joyplace.org.uk

oxford.anglican.org/who-told-you



Who told you? If you'd like to share how others helped you on your own journey to faith, then please get in touch with us at communications@oxford.anglican.org

Make a Difference to Local Schools



Photo: Shutterstock

Could you be a school governor or trustee?

The Oxford Diocesan Board of Education is looking for people with a variety of skills to become Diocesan-appointed (Foundation) governors and trustees in Church schools and multi-academy trusts across the Diocese. These are challenging but hugely rewarding voluntary roles that provide a real opportunity to make a difference to the prospects of local children and to promote Christian values in schools and education.

For an informal discussion, or to find out more about the work of our trustees and governors, contact **Penny Bingham** at the Oxford Diocesan Board of Education on **01865 208237** during office hours or email **penny.bingham@oxford.anglican.org**

The Oxford Diocesan Board of Education exists to serve our 282 church schools and all those who have links with education.

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